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ABSTRACT

The paper describes a current events lesson based on an editorial which quoted 10 tips from George Washington and suggested that a review of Washington's statements might be useful in making judgments about current national issues. Used in United States history, world history, and government classes, adaptation and revision of the tips lead students to gather information and evaluate the tips through primary and secondary sources. Washington's tips relate to issues of defense preparation, international relations, education, the arts, the sciences, moral values, land use, and federal-state relations. Analysis indicates that this format connects historical foundations with current happenings for a sense of sequence and stimulates insight into political, cultural, economic, and social roots. (TRS)

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Ten Tips from George

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"TEN TIPS FROM GEORGE"

Don Evans, teacher of history at North Side High School, Fort Wayne, Indiana, used an editorial in the February 16, edition of The Christian Science Monitor to construct a series of issues for his students. The editorial quoted, "Tips from George," admonitions from George Washington to his countrymen on live issues of his time. The editorial suggested that a review of Washington's statements might help their descendants make useful judgments about current national problems.

Says Teacher Evans, "I made varied applications of the 'Tips from George' to ideas being studied in history and government classes for two weeks. 'Tips' related to defense preparations and international relations were natural points of departure in examining President Reagan's defense policies. We discussed other 'tips' about education, the arts, sciences, and moral values of philosophers in a world history class. In government class we talked about land use and federal and state relations."

Mr. Evans decided to use the strategy with all his classes: world history, U. S. history, and government. He introduced the lesson with Washington's statement, "There is nothing so likely to produce peace as to be well-prepared to meet an enemy." Given a selection of other "tips from George," students concluded in their small group discussions that the

quotations relate as well to present as to past events. The first President's views on cabinet advisers to the President and two term limits on holding the highest office are still in effect. Students were asked at the end of the class to write their conclusions about the issues in a couple of sentences and keep these expressions of their views for comparison with similar statements they would make after further investigation.

Students then gathered information that would help them further evaluate the "tips." They used primary sources --- statements of public figures as well as quotations from interviews with their families and friends. They used secondary sources --- books, magazines, newspapers, charts and maps. One focus in United States history was generated by Washington's statement, "Excessive partiality for one foreign nation and excessive dislike of another cause those whom they actuate to see danger only on one side, and serve to veil and even second the arts of influence on the other." This was applied to the attitude of West Germans toward relations with the United States. Washington's statement, "Nothing in my opinion would contribute more to the welfare of these states, than the proper management of our lands," was applied to a recent controversy in New Mexico over land use and federal-state relations. On the third day of the study, classes listened to a

tape of a presidential speech given the previous evening about defense. They located quotations they wanted to match with those from Washington.

Meanwhile, world history class was looking at exerpts from two of Washington's statements in their study of Greek and Roman approaches to education, science and the arts: "Promote then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of public government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened," and "the arts and sciences essential to the prosperity of the state and to the encouragement and happiness of human life have a primary claim to the encouragement of every lover of his country and mankind." Students discussed the role of education and the citizen in each of these ancient civilizations, and they considered specific examples of art forms and scientific methods and writings of students studying the ideas of Greek and Roman philosophers. Washington's ideas provided a point of departure for small group discussions.

On the final day of the assignment, students discussed all quotations they had accumulated from Presidents as well as from families and friends and from their readings. Quotations varied widely in viewpoint from, "The more arms we have, the more likely we are to have a war," to "Defense is like new

shoes; they're necessary to have but no fun to buy!" Students wrote two sentences stating their own conclusions, which they compared and contrasted with those they had expressed before they did their research. Student statements were mature, perceptive, and insightful, best summarized in a realistic appraisal by one student: "The President is trying to do the best job he can, but he just can't seem to get it together with the nation, let along Congress!" Teacher Evans summed up his response to the experience: "The adaptations are endless, and I intend to use this approach in the future."

Mr. Evans developed his teaching plan in collaboration with Dr. Helen Lee, professor of graduate methods in social studies teaching at Indiana University - Purdue University at Fort Wayne. She asked her students to suggest further adaptations and applications. Replies were abundant. Current events assignments could lead a class committee to collect clippings of news stories about current issues that had been the focus of public statements by important political figures of the past. Weekly reports from the committee would trace public processing of problems identified in the statement, pointing out coinciding or contrasting viewpoints of present-day political figures. These data collections would present a resource for end-of-semester research papers, as would the training gained in gathering

information and summarizing it. Opinion surveys of family and friends compared and contrasted with statements made by political figures, past and present, would train students in interview techniques and handling primary source materials.

Students might also be led to use microfiles of newspapers if they live in a large city where such records are available. There are few better sources for the in-depth study of an issue than watching a story develop from the initial incident which turns public attention to it, through follow-up stories, editorials, cartoons, letters to the editors, and historical and developmental feature stories. This sequence can launch a study of the way a newspaper meets its responsibility to keep readers informed on public issues.

The class agreed that the "tips" format connects historical foundations of the republic with current happenings and gives a sense of the sequence of history. It stimulates insight into political, cultural, economic, and social roots from which viewpoints on public issues develop. It encourages the student to look forward and backward, down the vistas from which values and viewpoints emerge, submerge, and reemerge, appear, disappear, and reappear.

Dr. Lee's graduate students will continue to experiment in lesson planning with "tips" from important figures from history. These will be used in a

current events class for the week in which President's Day occurs. "Tips from George" will come from "Abe" on Lincoln's birthday, and from Martin Luther King's during Black History Week. Chase's Calendar of Events, compiled annually by William D. and Helen M. Chase, Apple Tree Press, Inc., Flint, Michigan ($12.95 paperback) chronologizes a birthdate record for important statesmen. Quotations from these worthies provide lively and often controversial views which relate the past to the present and direct thought to the universality and timelessness of recurring social, political and economic problems.